James C. Walker
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FAX TO: Cath Petrosky FAX #517 373 7158 2 pages

Please copy and distribute this fax cover and the attached sheet from the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety to the Chairman and all Transportation Committee members.

Attached is the announcement of the study done at the University of Virginia School of Engineering and Applied Science that demonstrated there was no safety benefit from differential truck speed limits or lane restrictions. It explains that such speed control strategies tend to increase the skewness of the speed distributions.

This means the speeds for all vehicles are spread over a wider range, which increases the potential for conflicts between vehicles. An even flow of traffic is the safest.

This study was funded by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. It would seem difficult for the AAA to now object to removing or decreasing the truck speed limit differential, since they funded the study that shows such differentials have no safety value.

The best result would be to remove the differential altogether, but to at least move it to 65 would clearly improve the safety situation on Michigan freeways.

Sincerely,

James C. Walker

cc: Thad Peterson, Michigan State Police Traffic Services
Representative Caswell

As an aside, I looked up some 2003 fatality data in Michigan. Out of 1,283 total fatalities that year, only 18 involved heavy trucks on Interstates (1.4% of the total).

Of the 117 fatalities involving heavy trucks on all classes of roads, only 4 were deemed as "speed too fast" by the investigating officer. Heavy trucks are driven by professionals, and their accident rates are quite low. There is no reason to think that would change by making it legal for heavy trucks to travel at their actual current speeds of travel.

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AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety NEWS

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NO SAFETY BENEFITS ACHIEVED IN TRUCK LANE AND SPEED CONTROL STRATEGIES REPORTS AAA FOUNDATION

Imposing lane and speed restrictions on truck operations on multilane highways has been utilized to attempt to improve the safety and the quality of traffic flow on these highways. A study sponsored by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety which was conducted by the University of Virginia's School of Engineering and Applied Science has concluded that no safety benefits resulted from the imposition of speed and lane restrictions on trucks. In fact, the study concludes that the potential for an increase in accidents involving trucks and other vehicles occurs when such strategies are imposed on highways with high traffic volumes which include a high percentage of trucks.

UVA researcher, Dr. Nicholas Garber reported that restricting trucks to the right lane resulted in a decrease of the vehicular headways in this lane. Decreasing vehicular headways causes a reduction in the number of acceptable gaps available for drivers wanting to merge from entrance ramps. This in turn creates the "barrier" effect making it very difficult to merge and a hazardous situation for all motorists at entrance ramps. This negative effect is even more significant on highways having three or four lanes in each direction carrying an average daily traffic greater than 75,000 vehicles and with a proportion of trucks greater than 4 percent.

Other negative results of truck lane and speed control strategies are congestion and an increase in the skewness of speed distributions. As the precentage of trucks in the traffic stream increases, the potential for accidents increase. The more hazardous conditions concentrated in the right hand lane by such strategies do not significantly change speed distributions and accident potential of other lanes.

A copy of the report "The Effect of Truck Traffic Control Strategies on Traffic Flow and Safety on Multilane Highways" may be obtained by contacting the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, 1730 M Street, N.W., Suite 401, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202-775-1456).

11/89